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What's Your Tin Can?

By Jim Carroll

Have you been to your local grocery store as of late? Did you see the new StarKist Tuna plastic re-sealable pouch?

That little package is responsible for almost $200 million in new revenue since it first hit the shelves. This new product innovation resulted not in displaced revenue, but entirely new revenue that didn't exist before.

It's a big change - and it took a long time to come about. After all, StarKist sold tuna for 110 years in the same old way - in a tin can. Yet they finally managed to come up with something new, and the results are stunning.

The new tuna pouch is a good segue into what is perhaps one of the most important issues for association executives to deal with - getting their members out of their tin-can rut.

How many executives and organizations within your association base are stuck in a 110-year old rut? Still delivering a tin-can day in, day out, with no desire to change? Quite a few, I would guess. Maybe not for 110 years, but at least for the last few years.

After all, it's been three years now since everything started going wrong - the stock market collapse, the end of the dot.com nineties, the downturn in the economy, terrorism, war, and ethics scandals.

Such constant negativity and so much failure has meant that many people and organizations have lost their innovative spirit. Who wants to try anything new today?

The result is that many people have lost their drive, their courage to go forward, and their willingness to change. They're still making tin cans, when new resealable pouches could revolutionize who they are and what they do.

That's why the StarKist story is so important. Here's an organization that has somehow shaken away the complacency that enveloped it for over a century. It has woken up to the opportunity that comes from real innovation and change. And the fact is, it's all part of a reawakening that is underway throughout the food industry, in which "the package is the brand."

Over the last year, food and packaging companies have come together in a partnership that redefines how new products are developed. Packaging companies, previously restricted to the sidelines, now take a lead role in the development of new product. Food companies, who used to be the only ones responsible for new products, now realize that if they are willing to open up their minds to a new way of doing things, they can see some darned powerful results.

Are your members stuck in a rut? Unwilling to change and be innovative? Is your association representative of an industry that is still making tin cans? If so, what are you doing as an association executive to try to wake them up?

It's an important question, and with a world that continues to evolve at an ever increasing pace, one that needs to be addressed.

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